

The Holy Mother on Human Problems

Swami Chetanananda

Once I asked Swami Ishanananda, a disciple and attendant of the Holy Mother: “Swami, you lived with the Mother for almost eleven years. Could you tell me the difference between her and the other women in our families?” The swami thought a while, then replied: “Have you seen any woman in your life who is devoid of desire? The Mother was completely desireless. You see, human beings have desires and only God is desireless. She was a goddess.” When a divine being is born as human, he or she acts like a human being. Traditionally, a woman’s life passes through four stages: daughter, sister, wife, and mother. The Holy Mother fulfilled each role to perfection: She was truly a universal ideal of womanhood.

Sometimes some women come to me with their problems. I tell them: “How many problems do you have? Read the life of the Holy Mother and you will see how many problems she had and how she tackled them. I am sure that compared to her difficulties, your problem is negligible. You are facing a problem in your single family; she encountered the innumerable problems of hundreds of families. She suffered from poverty, disease, and bereavement; was treated poorly by her relatives; and endured the madness of her sister-in-law, her niece Radhu, and some devotees. It is really amazing how she dealt with those problems calmly with love and compassion, patience and perseverance. We must learn from her how to solve human problems.”

1. Problems Adjusting to Circumstances

We have so much friction and misunderstandings among ourselves that we lose peace of mind, and we sometimes suffer from fear and anxiety. Most of our problems develop due to a lack of communication and faith in each other. We can solve many of our problems through frankness, humility, and making accommodations to fit the circumstances. Sri Ramakrishna taught the Holy Mother: "Please adjust according to time, place, and person."

The Holy Mother's tiny room in the nahabat in Dakshineswar was octagonal: its length and breadth were 7'9" and its height 9'3"; its door was 2'2" and height 4'2". Most probably the Mother was 5'6" tall, and she had to pass through that low door. She recalled: "The door of the nahabat was so low that at first I would bump my head against its upper frame. One day I got a cut on the head. Then I became accustomed to it. The head bent of itself as soon as I approached the door."

When she lived in the nahabat, there were no bathing or toilet facilities available; and moreover the temple garden was a public place and there was no privacy for women. The Holy Mother was extremely bashful and modest. She kept herself veiled so that no one she did not know could see her face. During the dark hours of morning, she would go to the jungle on the bank of the Ganges to answer the call of nature and then would take her bath in the Ganges. Once in the early morning darkness she almost stepped on a crocodile. Later she recalled her sad plight: "I suffered terribly by suppressing the urge for the call of nature and thus developed a physical problem. Only in the dark hours of night I could go out." What discomfort! Later, Yogin-ma (a woman devotee of the Master) realized her

predicament and arranged for an outhouse to be built near the nahabat. The Holy Mother underwent all these difficulties in order to serve the Master.

One evening, when the Mother was about twenty-four years old, she was returning to Dakshineswar with some people but she could not keep up with them. She was exhausted. She then had to pass alone through the meadow of Telo-Bhelo. When she was accosted by a robber, it was not possible for her to run away or to shout for help. Nor could she fight with him or bribe him. How fearlessly and tactfully she adjusted to the situation! She immediately established a relationship with him by saying: "Father, I am your daughter Sarada. My companions have left me behind. Perhaps I am going in the wrong direction. Your son-in-law lives at the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. I am going to him. Please accompany me there. He will certainly appreciate your kindness and show you proper courtesy." How wonderfully she made that robber her own!

Concerning interpersonal relationships, the Master told Hriday: "You must bear with me and I must bear with you; then everything will go well. Otherwise we shall have to summon the manager to make up our differences."¹ The Mother learned this beautiful trait from the Master. Her unselfishness, love, sweetness, and modesty conquered peoples' minds immediately.

Swami Ishanananda told us this marvellous story concerning the Mother's presence of mind, strong common sense, and ability to adjust according to time and situation.

It was winter 1919. The Holy Mother went from Calcutta to Vishnupur by train and then by six bullock carts to Koalpara. On the

way we stopped at Jaipur [8 miles from Vishnupur] and began to cook near a roadside inn. The cook began to prepare dal. The Mother was happy to see the arrangements for cooking. The Mother washed her hands and feet in the nearby pond and then helped by cutting vegetables. Most of the cooking was done when the cook broke the earthen rice pot while removing the extra foamy water. The cooked rice was scattered on the ground. What to do? We were in a dilemma. We thought that if we bought another pot and cooked more rice, it would be too late to reach Koalpara, and moreover the road was not safe. We still had to cross another 14 miles.

The Mother was not upset at all. She slowly removed the foamy part with a straw ladle and collected the rice from the top. She then washed her hands, took out the Master's picture from her tin box and placed it on its corner. She took a sal leaf, put some rice, dal, and vegetables on it, and then placed it in front of the Master. With folded hands she prayed: "Master, you have arranged this food for us today. Please eat it now quickly while it is warm."

Observing the Mother's unconventional behaviour, we began to laugh. The Mother then told us: "Look, one should act and adjust according to time. Now all of you sit down and I shall serve the food." The Mother's women companions and we sat on the ground. She scooped rice with a wooden ladle from the top of the heap and put it on our leaf plates one after another, then added other dishes. She also took food in the same way and began to eat, extending her legs. She commented: "The food is delicious." We hurriedly finished our lunch,

packed the luggage, and resumed our journey. We reached Koalpara Ashrama at 11:00 p.m.²

2. Problem in Spiritual Life

A monastic disciple of the Mother was passing through a dry spell, “the dark night of the soul.” He stopped visiting her, even though he lived only a few blocks from the Mother’s Udbodhan house. Finally, he wrote a letter to the Mother requesting her to take back the mantra she had given him. The Mother sent for him. When he arrived, she said: “Look here, my child, the sun dwells high in the sky and water remains on the earth. Does the water have to shout at the sun and ask: ‘O Sun, please take me up?’ It is the very nature of the sun to take up the water in the form of vapour. Let me assure you that you will not have to practise any discipline.”³ What reassurance! It seems similar to the “power of attorney” that Sri Ramakrishna accepted from Girish Ghosh.

Because our minds are restless, we can have no peace. This is a universal problem. In great anguish, a disciple complained to the Mother: “Mother, either remove my inner restlessness or take back your mantra.” She was so moved by her disciple’s suffering that her eyes became filled with tears, and she said fervently: “All right, you will not have to repeat the mantra anymore.” These words frightened him; he thought that his relationship with her was severed forever. He anxiously said: “You have taken away everything from me! What shall I do now? Does it mean that I am going to hell?” The Holy Mother said in an animated voice: “What do you mean? You are my child; how can you go to hell? Those who are my children are already free. Even Providence cannot send them to hell.”⁴

Many aspirants suffer from doubt and confusion in spiritual life. Swami Basudevananda had the same problem. He recalled: "Once I returned to Udbodhan from Noakhali [now in Bangladesh] after conducting a relief work. I asked the Mother: 'Sometimes I get confused and do not find anyone nearby to ask about my doubt. What shall I do then?'

"The Mother replied: 'Keep a picture of the Master always with you, and think that he is with you and looking after you. If you have any question, pray to him; you will see that he will show the solution in your mind. He is always within you. Because the mind is extroverted, people do not see within. They search for him outside. When you pray for something, and if it is absolutely necessary for you, you will find the answer arising within like a flash. If any person prays to the Master wholeheartedly, he listens and arranges things accordingly. *Is it necessary to say something twenty times to a gentleman?*'"⁵

3. Problems Controlling the Mind

The difference between the sane and the insane is that a sane person has control over his or her emotions and an insane person does not. It is easy to control a pure mind. The Mother suggested various methods to different disciples. She said: "My child, this mind is just like a wild elephant. It races with the wind. Therefore one should discriminate all the time. One should work hard for the realization of God."⁶

Disciple: "I cannot concentrate my mind during meditation. My mind is fickle and unsteady."

Mother: "Don't worry. Restlessness is the nature of the mind, as it is of the eyes and ears. Practise regularly. The Name of God is more powerful

than the senses. Always think of the Master, who is looking after you. Don't be troubled about your lapses."

Disciple: "However I may try to remove evil thoughts, I do not succeed."

Mother: "This is the result of what you have done in your past life. Can one get rid of it by force? Cultivate good company, try to be good, and in time you will succeed. Pray to the Master. I, too, am here.

"Don't be afraid. I tell you in this Kaliyuga mental sin is no sin. Free your mind from all worries on this account. Can anyone altogether destroy lust? A little of it remains as long as one has a body. But it can be subdued, as a snake can be subdued by charmed dust."⁷

Sometimes the Mother inspired her disciples by telling them how she had practised sadhana. She said: "On moonlit nights I would look at the moon and pray, 'May my mind be pure as the rays of the moon! O Lord, there are stains even on the moon, but let my mind be absolutely stainless.

"When I was in Vrindaban, I used to visit Bankubihari [Krishna in a bent pose] and pray to him: 'Your form is bent, but your mind is straight. Lord, let there be no crookedness in my mind.'"⁸

4. Problems in a Householder's Life

Some people ask if married life is antagonistic to spiritual life. Many ancient rishis were married; so were avatars such as Rama, Krishna, Chaitanya, and Ramakrishna. The *Mahanirvana Tantra* says: "The householders should connect their lives with Brahman and try to realize Him. And whatever actions they perform, their results should be offered to Brahman." Ramakrishna and Holy Mother had both monastic and

householder disciples. They adjusted their teachings for each individual and demonstrated that each path ultimately leads to the same goal.

A young man, out of temporary dispassion, expressed an unwillingness to marry. The Mother said to him: "How is that? God has created things in pairs -- two eyes, two ears, two legs -- and likewise, man and woman." To someone hesitant about marriage, Mother said: "Why can't one lead a good life if one is married? The mind alone is everything. Did not the Master marry me?"⁹

"The householders have no need of external renunciation. They will spontaneously get internal renunciation. The Master said, 'One must practise self-control after the birth of one or two children.' Spiritual progress becomes easier if husband and wife agree in their views regarding spiritual practices."¹⁰

Regarding earning money and accumulating it, the Mother said: "You have your wife and children. You should lay by something for them. Besides, you will be able to serve the holy men too. The household is the Lord's, and so in whatever work He has placed you, you should do your best to perform it well. If sorrows and troubles assail you, call on the Master and he will show you the way."¹¹

5. Problems in Monastic Life

The Holy Mother, like Ramakrishna, always held the ideal of renunciation before the monastic disciples. The monastic life is not an easy path. When monks would come to the Mother with their problems, she cautioned them: "The Master said, 'O sadhu, beware!' Sadhus should always be alert. The path of a sadhu is always slippery. When one is on

slippery ground, one should walk tiptoes. Is it a joke to become a sannyasin? If one had so desired, one could have married and lived the life of a householder. Now that you have given up such intentions, the mind should not be allowed to think of these things. What has once been spat out is not eaten again. The ochre robe of a sadhu protects him as the collar of a dog protects it from danger. No one ill-treats a dog that is wearing a collar, as it obviously belongs to someone or other. All gates are open to a sadhu. He has access everywhere.”¹²

Lust and gold are maya. It is not easy to overcome maya. As a loving mother, she told the monks emphatically: “A monk must not lower the ideal of renunciation. Even if a wooden image of a woman lies upside down in the road, he must not turn it the other way, even with his foot, to look at its face.

“It is extremely dangerous for a monk to possess money. There is nothing impossible for the round pieces to do -- even to the extent of endangering life.

“A monk must sever all the chains of maya. Golden chains are as much a bond as iron chains. A monk must have no attachments.”¹³

6. Various Problems in Human Life

After Ramakrishna passed away, the Mother conducted his ministry for thirty-four years. She was a village woman without a formal education; but she helped innumerable people and solved their problems through her love and compassion, patience and forbearance, divine wisdom and practicality. The Master’s disciples accepted her instructions without question. When Swami Vivekananda had a dilemma concerning his journey to the West, he

wrote to the Mother for her advice. She asked him to go. The disciples knew that the Mother and the Master were the same.

Some monks who could not fit in with other centres and some who had mental problems took shelter at Holy Mother's house. For example, her sister-in-law Surabala was mad, and her niece Radhu was not normal either. It is really astounding how she dealt with those diverse personalities through her love and compassion.

One day a woman devotee bit the Mother's big toe while taking leave of her. The Mother cried aloud: "Goodness gracious! What kind of devotion is this? If you want to touch my feet, why not do so? Why this biting the toe?" The woman said, "I want you to remember me." "Indeed!" the Mother replied: "I never before saw such a novel way of making me remember a devotee." Another time a male devotee saluted the Mother by striking her little toe with his forehead so violently that she cried out in pain. Those present asked the devotee why he did that. He replied: "I purposely gave her pain while saluting her so that she will remember me as long as the pain lasts."¹⁴

Dr. Kanjilal was the Mother's disciple and physician. One day his wife prayed to the Mother: "Mother, please give your blessings so that my husband's income may increase." The Mother replied bluntly: "Do you want me to wish that people may be sick and that they may suffer? Certainly I can never do that. I pray that all may be well, all may be happy."¹⁵

Her selfless love was showered upon all who went to her for succour, irrespective of caste or creed, merit or demerit. She helped them with food, clothes, or medicine according to their need. While she was in Koalpara, a

low-caste woman came to her in distress and sought her help. She had been discarded by her paramour, for whose sake she had left her own home, and now she was completely helpless. The Holy Mother sent for the man and gently reproved him: "Look here, she has renounced all for your sake. And you have accepted her service for a long time. It will be very sinful for you to reject her now; there will be no room for you even in hell." The couple was reconciled.¹⁶

Many Muslims lived in a village near Jayrambati called Shiromanipur. They made their livelihood by cultivating silkworms. When their business failed because of foreign competition, many people lost their jobs and turned to crime to support themselves. When the Mother's new house in Jayrambati was under construction, the monks hired Muslim labourers from that area. The villagers were afraid at first, but later were amazed by their transformation. The Mother fed them and eased their economic problems. The villagers commented: "Look, these robbers have become devotees by the Mother's grace."

A disciple of the Mother wrote: "The poor people here suffer if the Mother is not in Jayrambati. When she is here, she buys milk, vegetables, and fruits which the villagers grow in their yards. Thus they earn a little money. But when the Mother goes to Calcutta, they cannot sell their things. For that reason, the Mother comes to Jayrambati."¹⁷ She was a village girl, so she did not like the sophisticated city life in Calcutta very much. She loved to move freely in her village; but while she was there, she had to solve the problems of her brothers' families.

Some diseases are cured naturally by the human system, but a doctor's medicine can cure them more quickly. In the same way, although time

heals many problems by itself, illumined souls have the power to solve human difficulties promptly and decisively. The Holy Mother was simple and pure, loving and caring, selfless and compassionate, and forbearing and forgiving. Everyone felt safe and secure in her presence.

Swami Ishanananda told us how the Holy Mother assuaged the grief of a poor woman who had lost her young son:

“I was then living with the Mother at Jayrambati. One day I hired an elderly woman porter to carry some groceries for the Mother. We reached Jayrambati at 10:00 a.m. She took down the load from her head and bowed down to the Mother. The Mother knew her as she used to carry luggage for Calcutta devotees from Koalpara to Jayrambati. The Mother asked: ‘Hello Majhi’s wife, I have not seen you for a long time. What happened?’ She replied in a sad tone: ‘Mother, now I am passing through a very hard time. I move around here and there for my livelihood. For that reason, your devotees do not find me to carry their goods and luggage. Some days ago my young son died who was the earning member of our family.’

“At this, the Mother said: ‘What sad news, my dear!’ Immediately the Mother’s eyes became wet. Having sympathy from the Mother, the elderly lady cried out loudly. The Mother sat on her veranda, pressed her head on a pole, and began to cry loudly. Listening to their cries, other women of the household rushed there and watched this pathetic scene silently. Thus some time passed. Later, when their emotion cooled down, the Mother softly asked her woman attendant to bring some coconut oil. The Mother poured that oil on that woman’s dry and dishevelled hair and rubbed it with her hand. The Mother also tied puffed rice and solid molasses in one corner of her cloth, and while bidding farewell she said with her tearful

eyes: 'Please come again, my sweet child.' Observing the face of that woman, I realized how much consolation she had derived from the Mother's compassionate behaviour."¹⁸

¹ *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother*, Ramakrishna Math (Chennai, 1985), p. 83.

² Swami Ishanananda, *Matri Sannidhey*, Udbodhan Office (Calcutta, 1971), p.92-93.

³ Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre (New York, 1962), p. 159.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.159.

⁵ Swami Chetanananda, comp. *Matridarshan*, Udbodhan Office (Calcutta, 1987), p.101.

⁶ *Teachings*, p.28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.28-31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.90-91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.92-93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.94, 96.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.78-79.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.80-83.

¹⁴ *Holy Mother*, p.161.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.161.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.164.

¹⁷ Manadashankar Das Gupta, *Sri Sri Ma Saradamani Devi* (Calcutta, 1956), p.393.

¹⁸ *Mayer Katha*, Udbodhan Office (Calcutta, 1965) vol.2:224-25.